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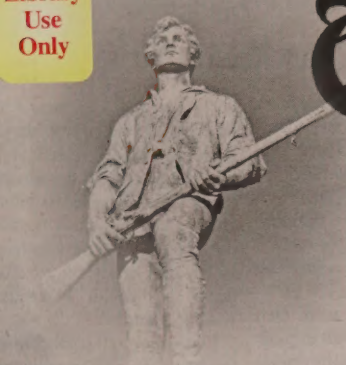

The Musket

LEXINGTON HIGH SCHOOL'S STUDENT-RUN NEWSPAPER SINCE 1969

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Lexington High School's Green Team promotes sustainability through composting

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Cate Aggouras, varsity basketball athlete, commits to Babson College

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Charles Yu Visits LHS

■ Seiya Saneyoshi
Alex Lau
Staff Writers

As a part of the biannual Lexington in Conversation speaker series, Charles Yu visited Lexington High School on Nov. 3 to provide insight on his critically-acclaimed novel, Interior Chinatown.

The selection process for LHS's first community read began in the winter of 2020. Fifteen months and three rounds of review later, a group of 16 students and 15 faculty members chose Interior Chinatown as the schoolwide text, hoping to spark conversations at LHS about the Asian American experience.

"I'm looking for students and faculty alike to come away with more questions than answers. I want people to be reflective about the way that we all operate in our society as it is, and then how we want that to look like eventually," Abigail Chaffer, a LHS English teacher on the text selection committee, said.

Chaffer cited Interior Chinatown's unique format, satirical style, and the author's relevance as reasons why she supported the novel's selection. However, the text has evoked mixed reactions from students.

"I've heard two opinions. I think one opinion really likes the book… it was ...important for us and I think that what was said in the book was true and was really important… A lot of people found it a little bit hard to get through, but I think that was more… the way it was written," Frances Adiwijaya, a senior and leader of Asian Student Union, said.

While the novel's format elicited some criticism, many students connected with the central themes of belonging and developing one's identity.

"A lot of the things that he went through, the idea of the familial pressure to be something interesting and be exciting, that's obviously there in my own family and I think a lot of my friend's families," Adiwijaya said.

The community read culminated in a conversation with Charles Yu. While a few select classes were in the auditorium, most students tuned into a livestream courtesy of LexMedia to watch Yu answer questions from three student moderators regarding his writing process and the text itself. During the day, Yu also met with the Asian Student Union and humanities classes. In the evening, Yu participated in an event open to the general public in which Samantha St. Lawrence, an English teacher at LHS, facilitated a second conversation with the author.

Image courtesy of Brittany Lin
Auditorium interview with Charles Yu

"I really enjoyed the whole evening. I thought that the… host of the evening did a wonderful job of asking really insightful questions. I thought that [Yu] did a terrific job of answering some really personal questions too. As somebody who writes as well it's interesting to hear him talk about how it was a bunch of experiences that he had that led him to where he is today. I connected with that very strongly," Todd Whitten, an attendee and high school teacher, said.

Some considered this iteration of Lexington in Conversation a success in creating the change members of the text selection committee hoped to see. Others acknowledged it as a step in the right direction.

"I think it was important to have a narrative that really fit our school and was really relevant to what was going on right now," Adiwijaya said.

LHS Cafeteria Faced with National Food Shortage

■ Anvita Kalpande
Sapphire Wang
Staff Writers

The Lexington High School cafeteria is currently facing a food and packaging materials shortage due to national supply-chain issues. The Lexington Public Schools administration sent out an email notifying the community of this issue in October.

The unprecedented shortage has created a variety of issues, most notably the deficiency of paper items.

"We are constantly having to juggle around different types of paper items, which hurts our compost program because the items that we do have may not be compostable, and it gets confusing for the students when they go to discard their items," Kevin Silvia, the food service director at Lexington, said.

Meanwhile, the shortage of food varies daily. If there are not enough waffles in the elementary schools, LHS has to compensate. The food services have to plan accordingly to prevent a chain reaction from affecting menu choices across LPS. With changes being made on short notice, it can pose a challenge to students with allergies.

"Parents want to make sure if somebody's allergic to something, we make sure that we let the student know. That's why we have kids come through the line a lot, even though food is free right now," Silvia said.

With nine schools to manage, LPS is attempting to locate food in an organized manner while maintaining nutritional standards. Despite the shortage, students are still required to take food items from three of the five categories, as per USDA standards: protein, grain, fruit, vegetable, or milk.

This requirement leads to another critical factor that must be considered: food waste. Some students are unwilling to take a fruit or vegetable and will throw it out uneaten. To address this, LHS is working with Foodlink, a food rescue and distribution organization, to donate pre-consumer and post-consumer foods.

"We're working with them to see if we can donate to a shelter or see if we can take that and recycle it back in if it's been packaged," Silvia said.

While food shortage of this scale at LHS is unprecedented, the cafeteria continues to offer meals for free for all students.

"I think we're really blessed in Lexington because we are able to keep up with the amount of choices that we have so that students are still able to get the diversity of food and being able to pick what they want," Silvia said.

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Will the Extracurricular Vaccination Policy Keep Students Safe?

■ Medha Jayendran
Sreenidhi Dharmaraj
Staff Writers

This year, with the return of in-person learning, schools and states have ramped up safety measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Amidst nationwide calls for vaccine mandates, many local governments have begun to take action. On Oct 15, the School Committee enacted an extracurricular vaccination policy across the Lexington Public Schools.

In short, the policy requires students in rostered activities to either provide proof of a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine or participate in the weekly pooled testing program.

Although the extracurricular vaccination policy is a step towards a vaccine mandate, the LPS administration should take a more decisive stance and implement a stricter policy that requires students to be vaccinated to attend school.

"I think the only concern we would have is a pushback from the parents of those students who are unvaccinated right now," Sara Mei, a senior and student representative for the School Committee, said.

While Mei acknowledges that the policy may not have affected the larger student body, she said she believes that it has effectively incentivized unvaccinated students.

The administration has also created a website to display data tracking the vaccination rate and the number of cases at LPS.

"I think it's up to the parents of the children who aren't vaccinated to kind of look at the data and decide for themselves whether the vaccine is helpful or not," Mei said.

Efforts to destigmatize the vaccination process eventually may help ease the community into a vaccine mandate, however the process appears to be slow and ineffective.

There are approximately 170 clubs and activities at Lexington High School. Differentiating them into rostered and unrostered activities may be difficult.

"It's a moving target," Principal Andrew Stephens said. "[Rosters] are going to consistently change as clubs meet and they figure out who's coming and who's not coming."

Stephens also said that this entire process will need to be repeated for winter sports and activities, posing potential challenges in the policy's enforcement.

Communication around the policy, specifically at LHS, appears scarce and has resulted in a lack of action from the student population.

Ashley Zhang, a junior at LHS, believes that the policy is useful, however, she cites the lack of student awareness regarding the policy.

"Some people just know that they're vaccinated and then other than that, they don't go out of their way to think about the vaccination policy ever again, or testing at all," Zhang said.

These relaxed attitudes from students could undermine the efficacy of the vaccination policy and inhibit an increase in vaccination rates. Without proper communication to students, the policy may be overlooked.

Both Stephens and Mei highlighted that vaccination and testing rates in LPS are already high. According to data from the LPS COVID-19 Dashboard, as of Oct. 25, 2021, 89.1% of all eligible LPS students are fully vaccinated.

These statistics raise the question: are students rendered safer by the gradual implementation of COVID-19 mandates, or a full sweeping mandate that encompasses the entire system?

Perhaps the biggest misstep of the policy is that it lets students off the hook if they choose not to get vaccinated and drop their extracurricular activity. While the policy should encourage students to get vaccinated, families could still choose not to do so. In that case, there would be no changes to the vaccination rates. The policy also disregards unrostered clubs and activities, where attendance is not mandatory, but contact and exposure to others may be comparable to those in rostered clubs. This raises concerns for the spread of COVID-19 in unrostered clubs, and emphasizes the only way to ensure accountability and safety for all students is through a stricter vaccine mandate.

Even prior to the pandemic, vaccines for chickenpox and measles have been mandatory for students. Why should the COVID-19 shot be considered differently? A full mandate must be implemented to protect students and vulnerable populations in our community. Additionally, a vaccination requirement to attend schools will effectively incentivize vaccinations.

The administration is making progress by attempting to dismantle misinformation around the vaccine and gradually introducing the idea of a vaccine mandate into the conversation. However, given the circumstances, the administration should work more efficiently to implement such a directive.

In-Person Advisory: Productive or Pointless?

■ Sophia Zhang
Audi Lin
Staff Writers

Lexington High School conducted in-person Advisory sessions this fall to promote Lexington Public Schools' core values and foster a sense of unity after a year of shifting learning models.

However, even with the switch to an in-person format, Advisory does not appear to have clear benefits.

Advisory blocks are designated one hour blocks scheduled to meet on a monthly basis where teachers present slides about specific topics, and then students reflect on the material in a "community circle."

However, this year's Advisory doesn't seem to have achieved the desired "positive" effect, prompting questions regarding its practicality. Many students find it difficult to form connections with fellow students in this setting. Although students have been divided into smaller groups of approximately twenty individuals, not everyone is willing to engage.

"Some people don't like to talk to other people, and forcing them to do icebreakers is not going to help," Emmy Huang, a sophomore at LHS, said.

Additionally, many students already know the peers in their Advisory class from freshman year History and English, and find introducing themselves redundant.

"I don't think it helps to connect to a lot of new people, because you already know these people that are in your advisory," Tasneem Ghadiali, a sophomore, said.

Hannah Weissman, a new teacher at LHS, also finds that students don't seem to participate because they are uncomfortable or don't see discussions as a priority.

"I think a lot of students potentially are uncomfortable talking about it or maybe understand it, but would prefer to do their homework because they're stressed out," Weissman said.

Students also tend to find Advisory to be repetitive because similar topics are covered in other classes.

"[Advisory] is repetitive of the freshman health curriculum and the curriculum we see in English classes," Ghadiali said.

Advisory also adds to the challenge for teachers, who already have had to busy schedules. Teachers are emailed the curriculum material a few days before Advisory sessions, and often cannot spend adequate time preparing for the session.

"I generally look through the site, but I often don't have time to actually talk to my co-teachers because there's no time built into our schedule," Weissman said.

Despite the current issues with Advisory, there are benefits. For example, many students found the in-person format to facilitate easier connection.

"I feel like it's better because instead of everybody's cameras being off, you get to see people in person. People have better experiences and they bond more," Huang said.

Simply being exposed to thinking about the sensitive topics covered in Advisory might also help students in dealing with similar situations.

"I think even though maybe we haven't seen a ton of positive impacts, it's still good that students are thinking about [those] topics more," Weissman said.

However, if Advisory does not want to exist merely as a perfunctory "assignment" and aims to extract progress out of its genuine intention, the program should make changes that better reflect student and faculty opinions.

"I think it might make more sense to meet for, like, 20 or 30 minutes every other week. I think that could help. That's maybe the biggest thing," Weissman said.

Another way the Advisory experience could be improved is allowing students and faculty members to settle in before talking about sensitive subjects. Instead of scripted prompts and directions, conversations could start out more naturally to first build trust.

"I feel like it would be more natural if it was impromptu and people had normal conversations," Ivy Guo, a junior at LHS, said.

LHS administration should take time to experiment with what is effective, and help determine what is best for the LHS community.

"I think even though it's not perfect right now, I don't think we should throw in the towel. I think it just takes some time to iron out new things," Weissman said.

But more importantly, if no substantial changes are made to the construction and execution of Advisory, then perhaps even time—which there has already been a year of—can't redeem it.

lem would be solved if there were more legal parking spots in the first place.

LHS Nurses Embrace New Roles

Alexis Chen
Jessica Liu
Staff Writers

During the COVID-19 pandemic, school nurses everywhere have had to adjust to a new, more extensive set of responsibilities.

This includes the Lexington High School nurses, who currently manage the school's pooled testing and contact tracing system. Every Tuesday, participating students and staff pick up at-home testing kits and drop them off at designated locations in the school the following day. After all the tests have been collected, they are sent to a laboratory for analysis.

This organized system of contact tracing ensures that those who receive positive tests are quickly identified and notified.

"Our job is then to go back and trace and find out where that person was and then determine if someone was considered a close contact, and if that's the case, then we contact them," Susan Kaftan, one of LHS' three nurses, said.

The school follows the guidelines and protocols set by the Department of Public Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Lexington Public Schools' superintendent.

"It's an extensive effort and it takes many hours to do it, quite frankly," Kaftan said.

Kaftan said that the pooled testing system has worked well to prevent the spread of the disease.

"We haven't had any transmission of COVID within this school system. Anything that has happened is outside of school," Kaftan said.

In addition to school-wide contact tracing, vaccination clinics have also been held throughout the past few months to increase the school community's high vaccination rate.

"I believe we're at 92%, and even greater, a great goal would be 95%, and I think that would make a big difference on our pool testing," Meaghan Mead, another nurse at LHS, said.

Achieving that goal would help keep the community safe. However, despite the success of the testing, contact tracing, and vaccination clinics, the LHS nurses have faced new obstacles.

"It's been a challenge to be on par with the state guidelines," Raenne Brazee, another one of the school's nurses, said.

Sudden changes in regulations require changes in protocol, which have proven to be a challenge. For example, it has been difficult for students to maintain social distancing while in school.

Staff photo by Sujin Lee
Nurses provide accommodating help for LHS Students

"There's not really any way around the cramped hallways and small rooms, but even apart from those, people come into close contact to socialize all the time," Eugene Wang, a freshman, said.

In addition to keeping three feet apart inside, the school nurses advise students to wear masks, use hand sanitizer, and read the school's health updates.

"Be conscientious and be a good team player, community member. We're all in this together, right? And it's a big change. It's tough. It's hard. And I think we're ready to be done with it. We're not there yet, but we're getting there," Kaftan said.

The LHS Green Team

Gaeun Suh
Nikhita Prasad
Staff Writers

The Lexington High School Green Team aims to protect the environment by encouraging students to accurately sort their food items for recycling and compost.

The Green Team was founded by parent volunteers. It began in elementary schools before eventually spreading throughout Lexington Public Schools. The LHS program started when Tina McBride and Lin Jensen, Lexington Town Meeting members, set up composting with foreign language teachers at an international-themed supper at Diamond Middle School. Following their success, they discussed a larger initiative with the LPS administration, the custodial staff, and the lunch monitors to extend the Green Team to LHS.

"We had to explain and convince them that what we were going to do wasn't going to increase their work, but that it was going to decrease the volume of the trash by redirecting the organic food waste from the regular waste stream," McBride said.

Communication is critical for the Green Team to ensure their operations are efficient and effective.

"One of the challenges is that you have to have everyone on board for it to work. Communication has to be ongoing amongst several people," Jensen said.

The Green Team collects approximately 40 tons of compost each year to send to composting companies. The waste in Lexington is sent to an incinerator in North Andover. While the team's first contract was with Black Earth Compost, they are now working with Garbage to Gardens. Furthermore, the team is currently contributing to the climate justice movement by reducing the impact of food waste on low-income communities.

"Waste doesn't disappear... There's no more space in MA landfills. Trash is burned in poor neighborhoods because rich neighborhoods don't want to deal with the waste," Jensen said.

She also added that the program's advantages are becoming evident.

"Anytime we compost or recycle, trash will reduce by around 80%. We used to use eight trash bags, but now it's reduced to one bag at each station. The custodians can also see the difference," Jensen said.

Staff photo by Sujin Lee
Creating healthier habits through Green Team's endeavors

However, with many students taking advantage of the free lunch offerings this year, there is more food waste than usual. While many students sort their food correctly, there are plenty who make mistakes.

"Only 5% can make a mistake, but they have a huge impact. If facilities find trash amongst the compost, they would have to reject the waste," Jensen said.

Knowing the dire consequences that may result from inaction has motivated the parent volunteers to help composting efforts.

"It's a very rewarding experience because we have a great, motivated team that's fun to work with," Jensen said. "Everyone is supportive and self-motivated; what's important is that ultimately we're working towards the same goal."

Although food continues to be wasted in schools, McBride says that composting within LPS can have a large-scale impact.

"When students compost instead of trash, it makes a big difference. It's the perfect example of 'think globally, act locally". When people make little steps, we can ultimately affect institutions and behavior—that is what we're trying to do with the LPS green teams," McBride said.

In the future, the LHS Green Team hopes to recruit more student and parent volunteers, as well as bring awareness to students about sorting their food waste both at school and at home.

LHS Returns To In-Person Learning Model

Vedanti Bhargava
Jahnavi Bolledula
Staff Writers

On Aug. 31, Lexington High School conducted a full return for all students and staff after almost two years of modified learning.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, LHS offered hybrid and remote learning, in which students attended classes either online, in-person, or both. Now, as all students have returned in-person, teachers are once again tasked with overseeing full classrooms and building a sense of community among students.

"It feels great to be back in the classroom with all of the students. The kind of energy that you can get from fully in-person instruction, obviously is incomparable to what we had for most of last year," Ryan Casey, a Spanish teacher at LHS, said.

Justin Aramati, a music teacher at LHS, compared the overall engagement and performance level of students from last year to this school year.

"I feel that kids are even more invested and engaged because they missed it so much last year," Aramati said.

Due to the constantly evolving COVID-19 safety protocol, many departments have had to adapt. The Language Department, in particular, has had a difficult time guiding students in learning a language with the mask mandate.

"[It's difficult] for students to understand clearly what I'm saying in Spanish and for me to understand what students are saying, especially as they're learning to pronounce and enunciate properly," Casey said.

In addition to following COVID-19 protocols, teachers have had to modify lesson plans to match the recent transition to the six-day schedule.

"One of the benefits of last year was paring down the curriculum, really identifying what was most essential. And so I think what I'm doing, what many of us were doing this year, is trying to take that information and kind of overlay it on the new schedule," Casey said.

While adjusting to the transition process, LHS faculty have taken various steps to prioritize mental health.

"I try to make sure that the work I take home with me doesn't take over everything else. So making sure I set aside at least one day on the weekend where I'm not working, and making sure I'm getting exercise and eating relatively well. Just trying to take care of my body, because that makes me take care of my brain," Melissa Soule, an English teacher at LHS, said.

During this period, many teachers have found support from their department heads while navigating the safety and quality of the new learning model. Jared Cassedy, the LPS Performing Arts Coordinator, researched and proposed a solution to allow music classes to continue safely.

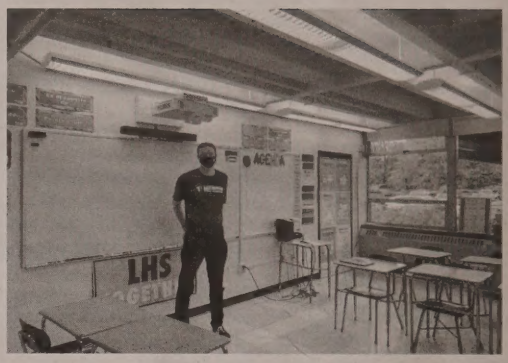

Photo by Michael Gordon
Spanish teacher Ryan Casey in his classroom

"Mr. Cassedy went and did all the research and found out what was going on at colleges and universities. He presented the case to the administration and selected the Board of Health, and he got us clearance to be able to play indoors. So without his support, and without the support of upper administration of the central office, we would not have been able to do what we did," Aramati said.

With the goal of future years being free of restrictions, many teachers emphasized the importance of following COVID-19 precautions.

"I think that all of us kind of want this to be over. And I don't think it's all going to go. It's very tempting to say we're back to normal, but we are not back to normal. And I think that's something we all have to remember," Aramati said.

LHS Welcomes New Dean Crystal Hunter

Zahra Karim
Anagha Chakravarti
Staff Writers

This fall, Lexington High School welcomed Crystal Hunter to join Scott Kmack as a dean for the Arts & Humanities building.

As a licensed Mental Health Counselor and an adjunct professor at Cambridge College School of Psychology and Counseling, Hunter offers a new perspective to LHS' administration as an advocate for growth through dialogue.

"I am going to go to the ends to fight for a student. That's just me," Hunter said.

She said she believes that young people deserve a chance and wants her students to know that they will have her support when they are in the right, but will also be encouraged to take accountability when they may be in the wrong.

"I want people to know that I'm going to celebrate every little thing. Every little thing about them. Because I'm inspired by you," Hunter said.

Sarena Shah, a senior assigned to Dean Hunter this year, described how her relationship with the new dean has impacted her experience at LHS.

"Dean Hunter has brought more diversity and a unique perspective to the LHS faculty. She knows what's hip and cool, and she is very understanding," Shah said.

Joining LHS amidst a pandemic, Hunter cited the influence of COVID-19 on her job, from the conversations with students and parents to breaking down some of the boundaries she had as an individual.

"It's like nurturing a life we used to know and may not know much anymore," Hunter said.

In addition, she emphasized the importance of sustained conversation in the LHS community to bring about change.

"Just because we change doesn't necessarily mean it devalues any of the past things we've done," Hunter said.

With the strain of the pandemic on student's mental health, communicating and creating a safe space for students is even more important to Hunter.

"I have to remember y'all are young. You need hugs too, you need to be told that it's gonna be alright," Hunter said.

Collegebored - *Screams*

Alex Tang
Columnist

Hi! I'm writing Collegebored this year. This space is where I'll share some thoughts about college applications as we go through the process together. Maybe it resonates with you. Maybe it'll give you a new perspective on the process. And hopefully, you'll enjoy it.

As a freshman, I remember seeing Collegebored in the Musket for the first time. Plastered on the page was a scream; "Aaaaaaaaa." At that moment, the very notion of college applications was pure anxiety. That hasn't changed. But let's scream together to let it all out: Aaaaaaaaaa.

Ok. When you think of the college application, the sheer amount of writing comes to mind. Brainstorming topics for the personal statement and supplements involves reflection. Honestly, the application process is a reflection on the passage of time. Searching for essay ideas involves digging deep into the past, the present, and the future. The last two years have been hectic. Sometimes, time moves like a swift mountain stream.

The prospect of college apps might have dawned on us last month or way back during freshman year. Applying to college seemed like a distant gray cloud at first. But now, it's a raging downpour, a cascade of water, a cascade of stress and hope.

Water has been around for billions of years. It doesn't get to decide which state it's in: solid, liquid, or gas. And during the college process, we also have no control over where we get in. Also, water isn't always in the same state. Just like how water undergoes phase changes, we will evolve too. The college application process evaluates our past selves, not our present or future selves. Applying and going to college is a mere fraction of life. In the end, getting in somewhere doesn't really bestow us with anything extremely special, besides the fact that we got in. We're still human beings with a lot to live for, and water is still water.

The coming months will be tough. So during these times, let's be there for each other. Let's not contaminate ourselves with toxicity. No matter what happens in December, in March, or in April, be pure.

Be water.

Chamber Singers Selected for ACDA Conference in Boston

Shreya Kesarwani
Vivian Wang
Staff Writers

The Lexington High School Chamber Singers have been selected to perform at the American Choral Directors Association Eastern Region Conference in Boston. In preparation for their performance this upcoming February, they have been building a new repertoire featuring diverse perspectives.

The 2022 ACDA Eastern Region Conference theme is "resonate," capturing both the musical and personal definitions of resonance.

"Shared resonance to me is the moments between the final resolution chord and the moment when the crowd applauds—the sound waves are resonating throughout the room, and the audience is silent as they soak it up," Vivian Kerr, a junior and member of Chamber Singers, said.

The conference's theme also reflects that by fostering diversity and inclusivity, music can connect with many people.

"Part of our mission in applying to this conference is that we had to put together a program that was not only musically satisfying and interesting to listen to, but one that satisfied particular guidelines around diverse repertoire," Jason Iannuzzi, the Director of Choruses at LHS, said.

The program includes a collection of works by living composers, female composers, and composers from historically underrepresented racial, ethnic, and cultural heritages.

"All these combinations help us empathize because all our music is by someone with a background that is diverse. We definitely get to know their experiences a bit more," Taylor Cooper, a junior and member of Chamber Singers, said.

The theme of the program Chamber Singers will be performing is "The Heart's Echo: Giving Voice To Memory." Each piece has been selected to bring forth memories, such as historical moments or treasured moments with a childhood friend.

One such piece is "A Blessing of Cranes" by Abbie Betinis, a composer based in Minnesota. The lyrics are inspired by Sadako Sasaki, the young Japanese girl who, diagnosed with leukemia after the bombing of Hiroshima, folded over one thousand paper cranes with the hope of recovering.

"["A Blessing of Cranes"] basically talks about the act of bending and folding and loving this origami crane into life is an act of peacemaking because you are dedicating yourself to something beautiful. And, in the same way, the singers who are performing this program are dedicating themselves to creating something beautiful," Iannuzzi said.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the logistics of performance are undetermined. Masks may be required while singing, and audience members may be distanced due to social distancing protocol. Despite these uncertainties, many of the students in Chamber Singers said they are grateful for the opportunity to practice together and perform in front of an audience.

"[Singing] at ACDA is an incredible honor, and I am so proud of Chamber Singers for all the work and love we continue to pour into our music," Kerr said.

Artist of the Issue: Maya Shimron

Photo Courtesy of Maya Shimron
Maya Shimron is a senior at LHS delving into various art mediums

Devangi Rathi
Lauren Wu
Staff Writers

Maya Shimron, a senior at Lexington High School, is an aspiring filmmaker who explores their queer identity through a diverse range of art mediums.

In addition to working on individual projects, such as their Scholastic National Silver Medal winning screenplay "Lemon Bars," Shimron serves as Editor-in-Chief of the LHS Yearbook.

"When I actually started making my own art, I did mostly photography for the yearbook, and then I did more photography on my own," Shimron said. "And now I've settled on film and screenwriting."

For Shimron, pursuing art came from a combination of curiosity and early interest in the LHS yearbook.

"I have a tendency of looking at things and being like, 'ooh, that's cool, I want to do that'. Photography was one of those things where I imagined myself being a photographer, and the opportunity coincided," Shimron said. "Yearbook was the foundation that started things, but a lot of my skills I developed just from personal experiences and scheduling photoshoots and stuff like that."

Shimron cites their queer identity as a major inspiration for a lot of their work.

"My goal is to create forms of art that represent my voice and the non-binary experience that is currently not represented," Shimron said.

As both an activist and artist, Shimron strives to evoke deep emotions from their audience.

"There are times that I want people to feel kind of uncomfortable because it's similar to a lot of the stuff we've been talking about in school, with uncomfortable conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion. I feel like a lot of times, queer people are left out of that conversation," Shimron said.

Shimron named Wes Anderson as one of their favorite filmmakers because of his unique writing style. Although Shimron is inspired by Anderson's work, they noted a caveat.

"A lot of his leads are always white men, unless it's animated, like Fantastic Mr. Fox, and he doesn't do a lot of stuff in terms of representation. So I look up to his storytelling style, but I'd want to be better than that part of it," Shimron said.

Consistent with their background in various mediums, Shimron expressed interest in exploring new film genres in the future.

"Since film is my focus, [I'm interested in] different types of film, like dabbling in experimental, making feature films, or even writing musicals. Theater is very interesting, and while I'm not too well-versed in it, writing for theater is different from writing for the screen, and trying that out might be really fun," Shimron said.

Their advice for beginning artists includes taking art classes at LHS and talking to teachers about independent studies at LHS, which are opportunities many students are unaware of. Above all, Shimron advises to get started.

"The first thing you make probably is not going to be the best thing you'll make, but you have to start somewhere, and filming something bad is what it takes to look at it and go, 'That's bad, but this is what I need to do to make it better,' " Shimron said.

A note from your Editors-in-Chief:
For the 2021-2022 school year, we are returning to producing traditional print newspapers, as well as expanding our digital presence through online exclusives and social media. We hope to continue providing the LHS community with engaging and relevant content. Thank you for supporting The Musket.

Best,
Avni Kamat & Claire Pak

College Admissions: Compassion Over Competition

■ Darren Tran
Columnist

"No way is she getting into [insert a top 20 college here according to U.S. News]."

If you walk through the Lexington High School library or meander amongst the lunch tables, you might hear students faced with the college application process make such remarks. Your gut reaction might be to condemn their remarks, but if you take a moment to reflect, you might begin to believe them. However, I find the sentiment expressed in this statement wrong and unnecessary.

Sure, you can blame LHS' academic rigor as a contributor to the intense "comparison culture," but I have to disagree that this is the primary reason. School culture is ultimately driven by the students, and this mad rat race to college distracts students from the actual learning in class. While changing the toxicity of this culture is easier said than done, we can at least make an effort to not discredit people and their post-secondary plans.

Additionally, even though LHS no longer has class rank, there are still perceptions of unofficial class ranks. "Oh, she's definitely in the top 5%, and him? There's no way he's above a 3.7." To everyone that thinks this way, I pose a question to you: what difference does having this mindset make? If you care that much about the nonexistent class rank, why not just focus on improving yourself? And if you say it is too late to do that, then why do you even care about ranking at all? It is this focus on the uncontrollable that creates unnecessary stress and frustration.

Next, where is the benefit in judging someone else? At the end of the day, many of us will eventually find ourselves at the hands of nebulous admissions offices.

For a high school that prides itself on producing the next generation of leaders, it is ironic and disappointing that so many of its students lack the ability to treat each other with the respect that everyone deserves.

Sometimes, it seems inevitable that a "Hunger Games" type of environment encapsulates the school, but it does not have to be this way.

To the students who find themselves projecting their opinions of others out loud: I know you are stressed out, but it does not justify your choice to aggravate the tension around the college application process by remarking on others.

And to the students on the receiving end of college toxicity: try to distance yourself from the negativity and surround yourself with people that help you in this pursuit.

The Lasting Effects of Zoom: How Have Learning Strategies Changed?

■ Austin Li
Columnist

"It's so weird to see everyone in person again!"—It's the fourth time you've heard a teacher say that today. School is back fully in person, and once again, you're waiting in crowded hallways hoping you'll make the next class within two minutes after the second bell.

In the last academic year, teachers needed to significantly adapt to online learning. From a student's perspective, all things were defined by Zoom: waking up three minutes before your first class, watching your teacher figure out how to share audio for a video clip, and half-listening to a lecture while doing the next class' homework. For eight hours a day, your eyes focused on a screen. Have we gotten better at learning after our remote learning experience? Was the online year a one-time passage, or did it have long-lasting effects?

I believe learning online makes the student experience far more personalized: you have the freedom to make decisions about your classes without any immediate consequences—unless you had a teacher that cold called, that's a different story. Regardless of whether class time was a group activity, lecture, or silent work time, students had the ability to choose how to best spend their time. In high school, this is beneficial as students should develop time management and independent working skills. If I had a Chemistry test during a silent work period for English, I could make the tradeoff to study for Chemistry and work on my English essay later that night. Yes, it's possible that someone might struggle to do work without an authority figure, but if students aren't motivated to use their time effectively, having a teacher to direct them wouldn't help. To clarify, I'm not advocating for an unstructured class, only that online learning facilitates individual decision-making.

Another large part of the learning experience was the way in which teachers provided instruction. For me, the most effective teachers wrote up lectures through slideshows and documents, guiding students through them during class. Although sometimes it was exhausting to see a chemical equation be balanced over eight slides, having online resources significantly helped my learning process. Whenever I was confused on a homework problem, I could look back at the practice problems and solutions shown in the slides. Prior to the pandemic, I rarely saw slides (at least not as developed as they were during the online period), and the majority of classes were done on the whiteboard. I have found that teachers who continued posting online solutions this year have significantly aided the learning process.

Now, to talk about the clear disadvantage to Zoom: cheating. Significantly more often, students knew test questions, hopped on calls during tests, and scoured the internet for answers. Although I don't see how the latter two could ever be helpful in a test environment, students from all over the country implemented bizarre cheating strategies during online classes. While teachers likely knew about the growing cheating culture, there was no solution beyond making tests more time crunched or writing entirely new questions. Cheating negatively impacted students' ability to truly understand new content, and created inequality between students who did not cheat and those who did. Returning to classes in person, students who resorted to cheating likely faced challenges with in-person assessments. Although the degree of cheating didn't continue into the new school year, there have been other effects. Beyond affecting student preparedness, student cheating bolstered LHS' competitive culture. The threshold to do well during classes decreased, thus "standing out" became increasingly difficult. As students entered school this year, the "COVID GPA Boost '' was infamous.

Ultimately, online learning inevitably changed the way students interact in the classroom and the structure of each class. Although we still wear masks at school, have distancing rules, and sit in on Google Meets when we're sick, the return to school has reversed many impacts that online learning had on students.

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Petitions at LHS: Are they Effective?

■ Tasneem Ghadiali
Columnist

Petitions are a straightforward way to engage with an issue you're passionate about — but are they truly effective? I've seen many people reshare a petition on social media or tell a friend to sign one during passing time, but are they really making a change? Or is petitioning just another form of 'slacktivism'?

Slacktivism refers to "helping" a cause by putting in little effort (such as, say, clicking the sign button on an online petition). As physical petitions have become obsolete with the advent of accessible online platforms and the global pandemic, online petitions are on the rise. These online petitions greatly diminish one's emotional commitment to a cause. It's easy for high schoolers to call themselves activists, but are they actually contributing to the cause? With petitions rarely impacting their intended demographic, are they even an effective form of activism?

I believe so because when you sign a petition, your information goes to the source, and petitions have historically been used in recruitment. Petitions can be integral to finding ardent supporters and proponents of a cause (some people actually read the email blasts and click the links on the website). However, just signing petitions is insufficient. They have to be paired with other actions such as writing letters to higher-ups and communicating with influential figures and institutions. For example, over the summer, I've signed online petitions for national issues (such as the Black Lives Matter movement). Yet, I haven't seen any real change come from these online petitions. Any change is typically the culmination of activists and organizations lobbying for change and perhaps, the petition.

At Lexington High School, there have been a few petitions, created mainly by the Student-Faculty Senate. A common issue of these petitions has been publicity. Many students don't know what is going on with student body groups and the administration, which leads many students to feel disconnected from the school's efforts. This year, Senate is working to prioritize communication with the student body, which is critical in the context of petitioning. However, the Senate has limited power, particularly since there is only one active faculty member (there are supposed to be ten). One petition that the Senate made last year was directed to the health department regarding changes to the health curriculum. It encountered a lot of adversity and, ultimately, was not implemented. Only around 100 students signed, and I wasn't one of them mainly because I didn't know about it. A lack of communication among the larger student body prevented the petition from gaining potential supporters. A larger base could have sent individual letters, shared the petition with their friends, and even involved their parents. Therefore, good publicity and exposure are integral to getting petitions across and involving more types of activism, eventually inciting change.

Overall, effective petitioning lies in effective messaging, effective marketing, and most importantly, effective recruiting. Although petitioning can be 'slacktivism' if you choose it to be, it can also be a meaningful way to engage with community issues. If you know about a petition, support the cause, and are ultimately inspired to do more than write your name or click a button, petitions can be extremely useful to create change, especially here at LHS.

Villeneuve's Dune: A Captivating Take on a Classic Novel

■ Pavan Cheruku
Columnist

You're strolling through a crowded sidewalk in Lexington center: the sun's out, there's a light breeze, and the trees are swaying from side to side. But as you turn a corner and approach a new bakery, you're inundated with the most heavenly smell you've ever encountered. The scent lifts you up and lures you towards its source. Before you know it, you're diving head first into a banana split cake, with banana slices and whipped cream all over your face.

Dune, the latest film by director Denis Villeneuve, is the cinematic equivalent of being captivated by a banana split cake. The movie, an adaptation of Frank Herbert's sci-fi novel, had me on the edge of my seat throughout its two and a half hour runtime. Villeneuve, who in my opinion is the greatest director working today, was the obvious choice to take on the challenge of adapting the novel's fascinating plot for the big screen. His repertoire of movies, including Prisoners, Blade Runner 2049, and Sicario, demonstrates his mastery over mind-bending plots and breathtaking visuals.

Though I completely trusted Villeneuve to do Herbert's novel justice, there's no dispute that the Canadian director struggled with condensing the lengthy masterpiece into a two and a half hour movie. The novel is full of extensive world-building and lore; there's tons of characters, intriguing ecosystems, and political/economic insights to be derived from the sci-fi epic. When David Lynch, one of the most inventive directors of all time, attempted to adapt Dune onto the big screen in 1984, he was panned by critics for cutting out substantial parts of the book in an attempt to keep the film from being bloated.

But miraculously, Villeneuve managed to incorporate the key plotlines and character arcs that defined the original novel without making the film difficult to follow. It's impossible to summarize this movie meaningfully without great oversimplification. Dune follows the harsh desert planet Arrakis, which is the only source of the valuable spice, melange. Melange has psychoactive properties, can increase life expectancy, and facilitates interstellar space travel. For years, the Harkonnens ruled Arrakis ruthlessly, extracting melange for their substantial financial gain. Everything changes, however, when the Emperor decides to put the House Atreides in power of Arrakis. Paul Atreides, the protagonist of this film, is played perfectly by Timothée Chalamet. Chalamet's portrayal makes Paul a character we can empathize with, even if we've never dealt with colossal sandworms like he does. Rebecca Fergerson embodies the role of Lady Jessica, who is Paul's powerful mother. Their relationship is the heartbeat of this film, and it grounds the fantastical elements of Dune in something humane. The rest of the cast is also phenomenal, with standout performances from Oscar Issac as Duke Leto Atreides, Stellan Skarsgård as the menacing Baron Vladimir Harkonnen, and Jason Mamoa as the badass Duncan Idaho. Unfortunately, Zendaya, an extremely talented actress who I was looking forward to seeing as Chani, was barely in the film. However, I expect she'll play a much larger role in the sequel.

Beyond the enthralling plot and performances of Dune, the cinematography and soundtrack were also top-notch. The cinematographer, Greig Fraser, along with Villeneuve, crafted each shot like a museum painting. I particularly loved how Villeneuve and Fraser played with contrasting sizes; there's a beautiful shot where Paul is surrounded by the overwhelming size of the desert. In contrast, the soundtrack, done by Hans Zimmer, felt underwhelming. Though it delivered at certain climactic points, I felt as though his soundtrack for Dune wasn't as engaging as other soundtracks he's made for movies like Inception and Interstellar. Nonetheless, I do find it amazing that he created new instrumentals just for this movie.

Besides my mixed feelings for the soundtrack, the only other qualm I have with Dune is the ending. This movie only covers the first half of the original novel, so it ends before we get any sort of resolution, which means this film doesn't really stand on its own. Regardless, I am super excited to see how the sequel concludes the story (of the first book in the Dune saga).

Because of its outstanding visuals, fascinating plot, and mesmerizing acting, I will give Villeneuve's Dune an A. It is without a doubt the best movie I've seen in theaters in years. I've been able to watch the movie twice so far (for free as an AMC Theaters employee), and I would urge anyone who loves science fiction, fantastic visuals, phenomenal acting, or just wants to support a one-of-a-kind director, to watch Dune.

Back to December (The Musket's Version)

Down University by Fiddlehead ~ Easy On Me by Adele ~ Come Together by The Beatles ~ Explain It at the Coffee Shop by Ashton Edminster ~ My Universe by Coldplay, BTS ~ Back To December by Taylor Swift ~ Easier Said by Kacey Musgraves ~ River by Joni Mitchell

Athlete of the Issue: Cate Aggouras

Rebecca Gu
Nora Kapoor
Staff Writers

Staff photo by Olivia Hoover
Student athlete Cate Aggouras commits to Babson College

Cate Aggouras, a senior at Lexington High School, committed to play basketball for Babson College.

Aggouras currently plays basketball year-round both for the LHS Girls Varsity Basketball Team and the Mass Huskies, a local competitive basketball program for young women.

Aggouras first started playing basketball recreationally at Hayden Recreation Centre in first grade, where she participated in camps and clinics before joining the town's recreation center team the following year. Aggouras recalled the exact moment she wanted to play basketball.

"I was in gym class and I had never shot a basketball before, but I made the first shot I took, and I literally said to my mom in the car, 'I want to do this for the rest of my life,' " Aggouras said.

However, Aggouras has encountered numerous obstacles during her basketball journey. In high school, she experienced many injuries, including three broken ankles and two concussions. Despite initial complications, Aggouras said she looks at these temporary setbacks as opportunities to return stronger than before.

"As long as you just put in the work and don't let them distract you, the injuries don't stop the journey, they just make it a little bit harder, but you'll get back," Aggouras said.

Like most aspiring student athletes, Aggouras said the recruitment process was tough for her, especially with her sophomore season being cancelled during the pandemic.

"There are a lot of ups and downs during recruitment. Sophomore year, the season got canceled, all recruiting pretty much stopped. Then junior year picked up again, and so since we were just coming off a year where we didn't play at all, it got super intense, and you really just had to focus on what you were going to do," Aggouras said.

Aggouras highlighted her parents, coaches, and teammates for being her support system.

"My parents... drive me to practice, and they give me the pep talks, after the game, before the game, during the game on the sidelines too. Coach Laura and Coach Martha were some of my first female coaches. Their encouragement really stuck with me and really inspired me to continue," Aggouras said.

Reflecting on her own growth in basketball, Aggouras advised other prospective recruits to take every opportunity to focus and work on their own skills, rather than comparing themselves to others.

"Don't focus too much on what others are doing because on social media all you see are the highlight videos, but you got to just focus on what you're doing. It can get really hard, but it's all worth it in the end," Aggouras said.

LHS Football Team Appoints Shane Wilson as Head Coach

Ellen Wang
Ishaan Tipirneni
Staff Writers

The Lexington High School Football team has appointed a new head coach, Shane Wilson, a U.S. History teacher at LHS. Wilson was notified of his head coach position shortly before the season began in early August.

"The players are getting to know me, and I'm getting to know the players. Getting hired two weeks before the season, I didn't know anyone. It was important to me to get to know my players as people," Wilson said.

With COVID-19 restrictions still in place, facilitating team bonding proved to be a challenge.

"They couldn't use the locker room, ride the bus, team dinners were canceled and couldn't find a host to do them. Those activities are how you build connections. Practice is practice, but those activities bring the team together," Wilson said.

Wilson emphasized that each player's accountability and the team's unity would be critical to overcoming these obstacles.

"Football is a unique sport, in that only one guy carries the ball and ten others get very little recognition, but they have to do the job. We emphasize 'we' over 'me'," Wilson said.

Aske Norhave, a defensive lineman on the team and a junior at LHS, shared how the team has incorporated Wilson's approach into their training.

"Our team works when we are able to trust that everyone does their job. In the morning we have conditioning together and after the game we do film. There is a time commitment, but we are all in this together. When someone messes up it's on all of us. We just got to get it back together," Norhave said.

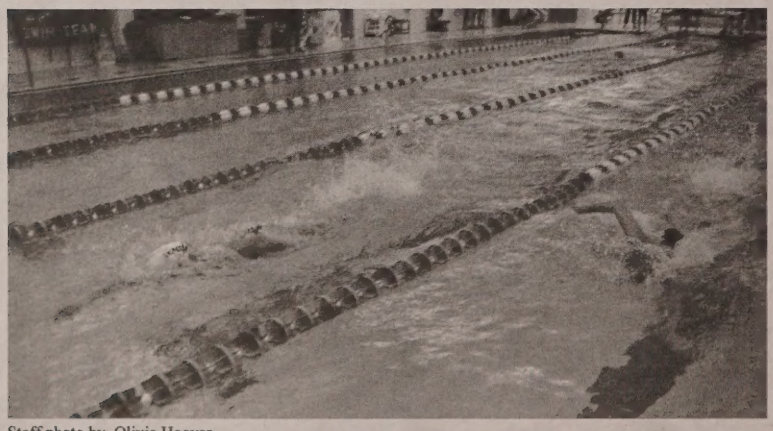
Wilson also said that the team captains, Aidan Lynch, Alex Exposito, and Justin Yates, have contributed to the team's growth both on the field and off.

"Captains led from the front since the get go. They are in charge of communication and I've been pleased with their leadership. One example is Aidan Lynch who has a torn ACL so he can't play, but he's been helping with the younger guys. Aidan saw a place where he could help out without me even telling him, now that's leadership," Wilson said.

Over the course of the season, Wilson said the team successfully worked together, continuing to strive for better results.

"It's been a chaotic year, but they've stayed together and that's not easy," Wilson said.

LHS Girls Varsity Swim Team Emerges Victorious



Staff photo by Olivia Hoover
LHS Varsity swimmers at Reading Memorial High School

Margot Bordman
Berta Cassanova Ferrer
Staff Writers

On Oct. 8, the Lexington High School Girls Varsity Swim Team won their meet against Reading Memorial High School, which was their first victory against Reading in over twelve years.

PJ Gruskin, a junior at LHS on the team, discussed the preparation for the meet from the bus ride there as well as efforts to pass on the sentiment of rivalry against Reading to motivate all of the new teammates.

"Reading has a tradition of waiting for the Lexington team to arrive, and then make a late entrance while banging pots and singing a song," Gruskin said. Witnessing this reminded the LHS team of their desire to emerge victorious.

The meet started with the critical 200 medley relay.

"In my opinion, what happens in this relay dictates the tone for the rest of the meet," Gruskin said.

Lexington won the relay, setting the team up for success later in the meet.

Overall, the team improved their performance, with many times being dropped. Gruskin described an electric racing environment.

"The mood was incredible...everyone was screaming and cheering," Gruskin said.

On the way back, the team played celebratory music and the coach gave a speech to praise the team for their amazing work.

Gruskin explained how all the teammates have developed a special bond, regardless of age. Gruskin also said that playing music on the bus has helped build community.

Gruskin praised the team's unity.

"It's unique because that's hard to accomplish with a big group of 30 girls," Gruskin said.